

MI Pet Fund OpEd on MHS Executive Director search

Michigan Humane Society can save thousands of animals with right leadership

With the recent resignation of Michigan Humane Society President and CEO Cal Morgan (1), one of our state's most prominent animal welfare organizations has a tremendous opportunity – to conduct a nationwide search for a new leader dedicated to saving the lives of innocent, homeless animals.

In 2013 alone, MHS killed 60 percent of dogs and 63 percent of cats taken in (2), killing nearly 14,000 animals. Those are staggering numbers, especially when you consider MHS accounted for 25 percent of all homeless animals killed in Michigan's 150 shelters. A new leader committed to life-saving policies can greatly reduce its kill rates, something we have asked of MSH in an open letter to board members. <http://www.michiganpetfund.org/advocacy/MHS/> .

Vowing a “new era” for homeless animals, Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel appointed Jeff Randazzo (3) as chief of the Macomb County Animal Shelter last year to reduce the shelter's kill rate. Randazzo is doing just that, raising the shelter's live release rate from 37 percent (the same as MHS) in 2012 (4) to 70 percent in 2013, showing the effectiveness new leadership can have on animal welfare.

We would like to see the same commitment from the Michigan Humane Society, embracing lifesaving policies to increase save rates and decreasing the number of innocent animals killed in its shelters. The organization's size and budget will attract many candidates, all of whom should:

- Be compassionate and passionate in saving lives
- Be experienced in shelter turnaround, having operated a shelter with a 90+ percent save rate
- Show measurable performance in lives saved, collaboration with local, regional and state rescue organizations and reduce shelter intake and homelessness

As MHS embarks upon its search for new leadership, we strongly suggest the organization set attainable goals for its short- and long-term future. With the right leadership, the Michigan Humane Society can join the hundreds (5) of animal welfare organizations nationwide that have made the pledge to find homes for animals, achieving the No-Kill goal of a 90+ percent save rate.

While not a small task, this is attainable through community partnerships, collaboration with rescue groups and engaging volunteers dedicated to saving animals, as the MHS should be.

During its search, MHS should look at the examples set by three shelter directors, one in its own backyard, who have had immense success in saving animals' lives.

Bonney Brown served as shelter director for the Nevada Humane Society from 2008 through 2013, in an area with one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation and a poverty level similar to that of metro Detroit. Within one year, Brown achieved a 90 percent adoption rate while substantially reducing the number of homeless animals in the county and installing proactive programs to keep animals in their homes and reducing unwanted births. (6)

Susanne Kogut opted for a career change in 2005 when she accepted the position of shelter director at Charlottesville Albermale SPCA, working with her board to not accept excuses. Her leadership resulted in a 90+ percent save rate and a new attitude on animal welfare in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Locally, Tanya Hilgendorf has led the Huron Valley Humane Society in Ann Arbor since 2005, building the most advanced state of the art facility in Michigan while transitioning the “catch and kill” philosophy to one of saving lives.

Animal welfare organizations locally and nationally are standing by to assist MHS in its efforts to save dogs and cats, should its board select new leadership dedicated to doing the same. Asking representatives from these groups to meet potential candidates and recommend their candidate choice, as County Executive Hackel did, might be a good place to start.

Michigan Pet Fund Alliance
www.michiganpetfund.org

Sources:

1 - <http://www.freep.com/article/20140114/NEWS05/301140077/Cal-Morgan-Michigan-Humane-Society-president>

2 - <http://www.michiganpetfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/MDARD-SHelter-Report-MHS-2013.pdf>

3 - <http://www.theoaklandpress.com/general-news/20130110/macomb-county-executive-mark-hackel-vows-new-pet-friendly-era-at-animal-shelter>

4 - http://www.michiganpetfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/2012-Save-Rate-Reports_V7_totals-and-amended.pdf

5 - <http://www.nokilladvocacycenter.org/about/>

6 - <http://www.nevadahumanesociety.org/pdf/HowWeDidIt11-08.pdf>